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But U.S. Won't Counter

'Times' Spreads Dubious El Salvador Story

The U.S. Embassy in El Salvador cabled the State Department on January 25 asking that "widest possible attention" be focused on "a totally false article" in the January 11 New York *Times* alleging that American military advisers in that country observed the torture of two suspected guerrillas. The cable noted that Radio Moscow had exploited the story in "vicious" anti-American propaganda broadcasts beamed to Latin America. Washington should expose "this blatant example of inaccurate news reporting on Salvador and its use by the left to attempt to associate US assistance with official terrorism and repression," the cable said.

The *Times* story, datelined simply, "Mexico City," and written by Raymond Bonner, was based on an interview with a former Salvadoran soldier, Carlos Antonio Gomez Montano, who said that men "he described as Americans" attended "training sessions" at which a 17-year-old youth and a 13-year-old girl were tortured. Gomez described the sessions as "torture classes."

A photograph was published with the story which showed "Some of the 60 Salvadoran soldiers who arrived yesterday at Pope Air Force Base, N.C., to begin 10 weeks of training at Fort Bragg. An infantry battalion of 1,000 enlisted men and more than 500 junior officers will be trained there."

Just one day after the story appeared, the Foreign Broadcast Information Service monitored a Radio Moscow broadcast which used the *Times* as its source for the charge that "gringo military advisers who are, in fact, CIA executioners," had

actually participated in the "torture sessions." Radio Moscow claimed that some of the Salvadorans who had come to the U.S. for military training were "specially chosen" by the CIA and the Pentagon to learn "the art of torture" and "how to set up prisons and concentration camps."

In the embassy cable, obtained by HUMAN EVENTS, attention is drawn to the fact that after the *Times* story appeared, "Radio Moscow began playing same tune almost immediately." The cable noted that Radio Moscow, like the *Times*, had linked the alleged torture sessions to the arrival of the Salvadoran soldiers in the U.S.

But "the embassy believes that the allegations...that U.S. personnel witnessed so-called 'torture classes' are totally false," the cable said. "Furthermore, our investigation has discovered several discrepancies in the New York *Times* article which tend to cast doubt on Carlos Montano's entire account [of] the alleged incident." The cable added: "No attempt was made by NYT to verify story here."

"Even a cursory reading of the January 11 article raises two questions," the cable said. "How could the NYT publish so prominently such a condemnatory article by a Salvadoran army deserter without checking out the facts on the ground? A second and even more serious question has to do with the timing of the release of the story which itself is not dated."

"We have learned through journalists that a group of Salvadoran exiles in Mexico, including dissident Christian Democrat Hector Dada Hirezi and ex-owner of the San Salvador leftist daily *El Independiente*, Jorge Pinto, offered Gomez's tale several weeks before its Jan. 11 publication, to several American journalists in Mexico City, none of who[m] would touch it for its obvious lack of credibility. The NYT not only accepted the story but held it until the first contingent of Salvadoran military arrived for training in North Carolina."

The cable also detailed a number of discrepancies in the story. For instance, although Gomez claimed that the American advisers he saw wore jungle camouflage fatigues and green berets, the embassy noted that U.S. advisers have not worn either. In fact, the embassy said they were prohibited from bringing camouflage fatigues and green berets into the country. Gomez said his parachute unit in the Salvadoran Army received training from U.S. advisers, but the embassy said "no U.S. trainers have ever worked with the parachute unit. Not even for a short time."



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